The Children's Crusade

Marcel Schwob

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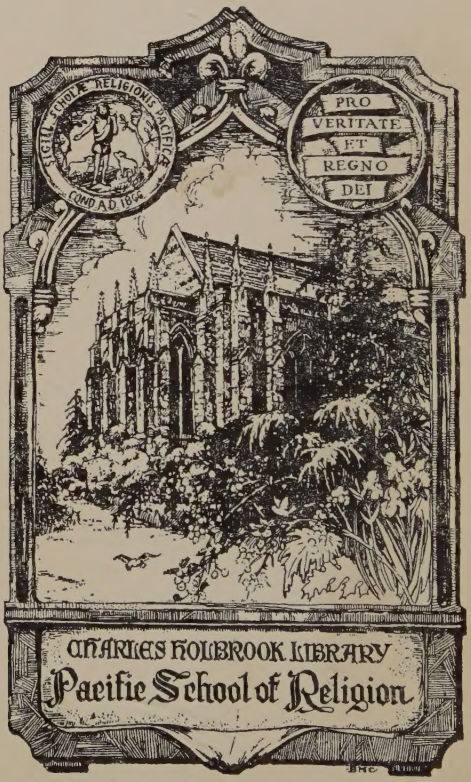
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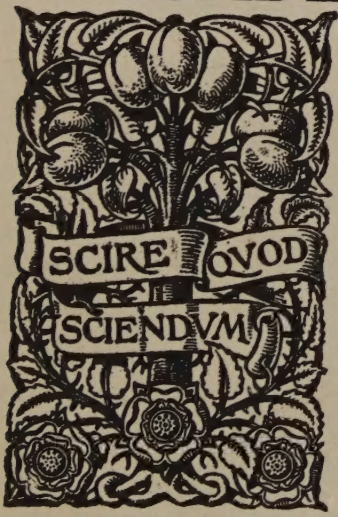

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MARCEL SCHWOB

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COMPARATIVELY unknown as Marcel Schwob is among us he is by no means a new-born writer. Seven years ago in "Cœur Double" he had already proved himself a thoughtful and clever craftsman, eager for all knowledge, keenly alive to the picturesque value of characteristic facts and appearances, sensitive to the pleasure of strangely primitive moods. And in later volumes he has not only shown an intellectual and vividly imaginative temperament but has half consciously revealed its gradual turning from theories and horror to the childlike trust of the Children's Crusade. ¶ Though Schwob wrote his first narratives and monologues in a very simple style and dedicated

them to Stevenson, he made their simplicity perverse and their richness rather ghastly; he lived his imaginative life in a world of complex fear. Looking on the gods and nature as successful oppressors he conceived both history and the inner life in terms of terror. He painted prehistoric man wide-eyed with natural terror: in an apparently libelous sketch of Rossetti he showed the artist seeking for sensations and overcome with hideous horror. But then, after gathering a variegated collection of criminals and depicting their life, he came upon a new emotion, sympathetic terror. This, thought Schwob, oddly rearranging Aristotle's doctrine of ΕΛΕΟΣ ΚΑΙ ΠΑΘΟΣ should lose itself in pity and give him peace. ¶ Still restless, however, and unrelieved by pity he diverted his imagination.

He gazed on the infinite strangeness of the past and the future, curiously eyed German metaphysics, and began to guess at the mysteries of man and the universe. Man's life, he decided, is part of the Infinite Life, and men are God's words, "conscious of their own meaning, trying to answer one another and Him; separate since we are words, but united in the sentence of the universe." All these "words," moreover, seemed to Schwob equally necessary to the completeness of God's thought:—in comparison with the Infinite Reason, indeed, the differences between finite creatures became infinitesimal. But in the presence of God's imagination, which for Schwob was the real world, these very differences gained the highest imaginative value; and noting them became the spiritual function

of art,—the aim of his life. With his imagination thus transcendently encouraged and his finite reason confronting the Infinite, Schwob created a series of vividly different kings, pirates, prostitutes, and children in "Le Roi au Masque d'Or," and still searching for strange things, wandered into ever new regions of dreamland and art. His lust for newness he says was "the appetency of his soul." And however that may be, he nourished his artistic power on Greek literature, De Quincey, and Heaven knows what not, and it grew in definiteness and delicacy. He wrote a set of tiny monologues, "Mimes," in which the slightest word carries acute suggestions of classic scenes and classic character. Then leaving antiquity he fell into the power of Dostoievsky and Maeterlinck, and filled with mys-

ticism and compassion saw at last the spirit which was to lead him to the Children's Crusade. The world of terror, Schwob wrote in his "Livre de Monelle," had vanished, and his "red kingdom" of strangeness, in which "all things were rubbed with hot spices and lit by red candles," had sunk into the ground. And in the midst of darkness a fragile, childlike being appeared saying: "Forget all things and all things shall be rendered to you again. . . ." "And she who spoke," cried, "A white kingdom! a white kingdom! I know a white kingdom." "And forgetfulness," wrote Schwob, "penetrated within me and in the place of my intelligence was deep purity. And she who spoke to me cried again, 'A white kingdom! a white kingdom! I know a white kingdom. . . .' And the kingdom

appeared but it was walled in with whiteness." A step more and Schwob entered into this kingdom. He embodied in "Vies Imaginaires" the keenly individual lives of typical gods and men; then gave himself to the mood in which the greatest things seem no greater than the least. So the philosopher became for him no more important than the child, and reasoning much less significant than childlike dreams. Full of sympathy with the child crusaders whose faith centuries ago led them to slavery and death, he made himself imaginatively, now their friend a wandering ignorant brother, now a leper their pathetic convert, now one of themselves; and he recounted in the naive words of each something of what each had experienced. Thus he gave life anew to these dead innocents, and in the cycle of

their tales not only told the pathetic story of the crusade but recreated for us their tragic, their miraculous faith. At last, then, Schwob's intellectual and imaginative wanderings were justified. They had brought him from horror to the simplest love, and they had given him power to breathe into a delicately original form the tender spirit of the Children's Crusade.

CIRCA IDEM TEMPVS PVERI SINE RECTORE SINE DVCE DE VNIVERSIS OMNIVM REGIONVM VILLIS ET CIVITATIBVS VERSVS TRANSMARINAS PARTES AVIDIS GRESSIBVS CVCVRRERVNT, ET DVM QVAERERETVR AB IPSIS QVO CVRRERENT, RESPONDERVNT: VERSVS JHERVSALEM, QVAERERE TERRAM SANCTAM ..... ADHVC QVO DEVENERINT IGNORATVR, SED PLVRIMI REDIERVNT A QVIBVS DVM QVAERERETVR CAVSA CVRSVS, DIXERVNT SE NESCIRE. NVDAE ETIAM MVLIERES CIRCA IDEM TEMPVS NICHIL LOQVENTES PER VILLAS ET CIVITATES CVCVRRERVNT.

THE GOLIARD

THE GOLIARD

I A miserable clerk wandering through the woods and along the roads to beg my daily bread in our Lord's name, I, a poor Goliard, have seen a godly sight and heard the words of little children. I know that my life is not very holy, and that I have yielded to temptation under the roadside lindens. Brothers who give me wine see readily that I am little used to drinking it. But I do not belong to the company of those who maim. They are evil men who gouge out the little ones' eyes, and saw off their legs, and tie their hands, so as to make a show of them and to implore pity. That is why I was fearful when I saw all those children. Doubtless our Lord will defend them. I speak at random, for I am full of

joy. I laugh at the Spring and at what I saw. My mind is not very strong. I received a clerk's tonsure at ten years of age, and I have forgotten those Latin words. I am like a locust, for I hop hither and thither and I buzz, and at times I spread my colored wings, and my frail head is transparent and empty. They say that Saint John fed on locusts in the desert. One would have to eat a great many. But Saint John was not a man fashioned like us. ¶ I am full of worship for Saint John for he was a wanderer and spoke random words. It seems to me that they must be sweeter. The spring, too, is sweet this year. Never have there been so many white and red flowers. The meadows are washed clean. Everywhere our Lord's blood sparkles on the hedges. Our Lord Jesus is lily

colored, but his blood is scarlet. Why? I don't know. That must be in some parchment. If I had been skilled in letters I should have parchment and should write on it. And then I should sup very well every night. I would go into convents to pray for the dead brothers and I would write their names on my roll. I would carry my death roll from one abbey to another. That is pleasing to our brothers. But I do not know the names of my dead brothers. Perhaps our Lord also does not trouble himself to know them. All those children seemed to me nameless, and it is certain that our Lord Jesus prefers them. They filled the road like a swarm of white bees. I know not whence they came. They were tiny little pilgrims. They had birch and walnut staves. They had crosses on

their shoulders, and these crosses were all of different colors. I saw green ones which must have been made of plaited leaves. They are wild, untaught children. They are wandering toward I know not what. They have faith in Jerusalem. I think that Jerusalem is far off, and our Lord must be nearer us. They will not come to Jerusalem. But Jerusalem will come to them. And to me. The end of all holy things is in joy. Our Lord is here, on this reddened thorn, and on my lips, and in my poor words. For I think of him, and his sepulchre is in my thought. Amen. I will lie down here in the sun. It is a holy place, for our Lord's feet have sanctified all places. I will sleep. May Jesus give sleep this evening to all those white little children who bear the cross. Verily I say it to him. I

am full of sleep. I say it to him verily, for perchance he has not seen them, and he must watch over little children. Mid-day weighs heavy upon me. All things are white. So be it.

Amen.

THE LEPER

THE LEPER

IF you would understand what I am going to tell you, know that my head is covered with a white cowl and that I shake a clapper of hard wood. I no longer know what my face is like, but I am afraid of my hands. They run before me like livid and scaly beasts. I would fain to cut them off. I stand ashamed before what they touch. They seem to make the red fruits that I pick decay, and the poor roots that I tear up seem to wither beneath them. *Domine ceterorum libera me!* The Saviour has not atoned for my pallid sin. I am forgotten until the resurrection. Like the toad sealed beneath the cold of the moon in a dark stone, I shall remain enclosed in my hideous gangue when others rise

again with their bodies bright. Domine ceterorum, fac me liberum: leperorus sum. I am alone and full of horror. Only my teeth have kept their natural whiteness. Beasts are afraid and my soul longs to flee. The light turns from me. ¶ Twelve hundred and twelve years ago their Saviour saved them, and he did not have pity on me. I was not touched by the bloody lance that pierced his side. Perhaps the blood of the Saviour of others would have cured me. I often dream of blood: I might bite with my teeth; they are clean. Since he did not deign to give it to me, I am greedy for blood that belongs to him. That is why I lie in wait for the children who come down from the land of Vendôme toward this forest of the Loire. They had crosses and they were subject to him. Their bodies were his body,

and he did not grant his body to me. I am encompassed on earth with a pale damnation. I spied about to suck innocent blood from the neck of one of his children — *et caro nova fiet in die irae.* On the day of judgment my flesh shall be made new. And behind the others walked a fair, red-haired child. I marked him; I bounded suddenly: I seized his mouth with my dreadful hands. He wore only a rough shirt; his feet were bare and his eyes remained placid. And he looked at me without surprise. So, knowing that he would not cry out, I longed to hear a human voice once more, and I took my hands from his mouth, and he did not wipe his mouth. And his eyes seemed far off. ¶ Who are you? I said to him. Johannes the Teuton, he answered, and his words were limpid and healing. Where are you going,

I said further. And he answered: To Jerusalem, to conquer the Holy Land. Then I began to laugh, and I asked him: Where is Jerusalem? And he answered: I do not know. And I said further: How will you be able to go there? And he said to me: I do not know. And I said further: What is Jerusalem? And he answered: It is our Lord. Then I began to laugh again and I asked: What is your Lord? And he said to me: I do not know; he is white. ¶ And that saying threw me into fury and I bared my teeth under my cowl and leaned toward his pure neck, and he did not draw back at all, and I said to him: Why are you not afraid of me? ¶ And he said: Why should I be afraid of you, white wayfarer? Then great tears shook me, and I stretched myself on the ground, and I kissed the earth with my

terrible lips, and I cried out: Because I am a leper! ¶ And the Teuton child considered me, and said limpidly: I do not know. ¶ He was not afraid of me! He was not afraid of me! My monstrous whiteness seems to him like the whiteness of his Lord. And I took a handful of grass and I wiped his mouth and his hands. And I said to him: Go in peace toward your white Lord, and say to him that he has forgotten me. ¶ And the child looked at me without speaking. And I went with him out of the blackness of this forest. He walked without trembling. I saw his red hair vanish at a distance in the sun. *Domine infantium, libera me.* May the sound of my wooden clapper come to you like the pure sound of bells. Master of those who do not know, deliver me!

POPE INNOCENT III

POPE INNOCENT III

FAR from incense and chasubles I can very easily speak to God from below the worn gildings of this room in my palace. It is here that I come to think of my old age, without having my arms upheld. During the mass my heart mounts and my body becomes rigid; the sparkling of the holy wine fills my eyes, and my thought is anointed with the precious oils; but in this lonely place in my basilica I can bend under my earthly weariness. *Ecce homo!* For surely the Lord cannot really hear the voice of his priests through the pomp of decrees and bulls; and doubtless neither purple nor jewels nor paintings please him; but in this little cell perhaps he has pity on my imperfect stammering. Lord,

this little cell in my basilica, and counsel me. My servants have brought me strange news from the countries of Flanders and Germany and from the towns of Marseilles and Genoa. Unknown sects are about to be born. There have been seen running through the cities women naked and speechless. These shameless mutes pointed to the sky. Many madmen have preached ruin in the public squares. The hermits and the wandering clerks are full of rumors, and I know not by what spell more than seven thousand children have been drawn from their homes. Seven thousand are on the roads with cross and staff. They have nothing to eat; they have no arms; they are helpless and a shame to us. They are devoid of all true religion. My servants have questioned them.

They answer that they are going to Jerusalem to conquer the Holy Land. My servants told them that they could not cross the sea. They answered that the sea would part and dry up to let them pass. Good parents, pious ones and wise, tried to keep them back. They broke their bolts by night and climbed the walls. Many are sons of nobles and of ladies. It is very pitiful. Lord, all these innocents will be given over to shipwreck and to the worshipers of Mohammed. I see that the Sultan of Bagdad is spying on them from his palaces. I tremble lest the mariners seize on them bodily to sell them. ¶ Lord, suffer me to speak to you according to the formulas of religion. This children's crusade is not a good work. It cannot gain the sepulchre for Christians. It increases the num-

ber of vagabonds who wander on the outskirts of authorized faith. Our priests cannot protect it. We must believe that the Evil One possesses these poor creatures. They are running in a herd toward the precipice, like the swine on the mountain. Lord, as you know, the Evil One gladly seizes children. Once he took the shape of a rat-catcher, that by the sound of his piping he might entice away all the little ones of the city of Hamelin. Some say that these unfortunates were drowned in the river Weser; some, that he shut them up in the side of a mountain. Beware, lest Satan lead all our children to the torments of those that know not our faith. Lord, you know that it is not well that our belief be transformed. As soon as it appeared in the burning bush you caused it to be shut up

in a tabernacle. And when it had escaped from your lips on Golgotha you ordained that it should be enclosed in the pyx and in the monstrance. These little prophets will shake the edifice of your church. That must be forbidden them. Is it in disdain for your anointed, who in your service have worn threadbare their albs and their stoles and who have sternly resisted temptations to gain you, that you receive those that know not what they do? We must suffer little children to come unto you, but by the way of your faith. Lord, I have spoken to you according to your institutions. These children will perish. Under Innocent let there not be a new massacre of the Innocents. ¶ Forgive me now, O God, that I have asked thy counsel in my papal crown. The trembiing of old age has

seized me again. See my poor hands. I am a very old man. My faith is no longer the faith of little children. The gold on the walls of this cell is worn by time. They are white. The sun's orb is white. My robe is white also, and my withered heart is pure. I have spoken according to thy rule. There are crimes. There are very great crimes. There are heresies. There are very great heresies. My mind wavers in weariness; perhaps we should neither punish nor absolve. Our past life makes us hesitate in our resolutions. I have seen no miracle. Enlighten me. Is this a miracle? What sign hast thou given them? Is the time come? Wilt thou that a very old man, such as I, should be in his whiteness like thy pure little children? Seven thousand! Though they be

ignorant in their faith wilt thou punish the ignorance of seven thousand innocents? I also am Innocent. Lord, I am innocent like them. Do not punish me in my extreme old age. Long years have taught me that this flock of children can not succeed. Nevertheless, Lord, is it a miracle? My cell remains peaceful, as during other meditations. I know that we need not to implore thee, for thee to manifest thyself; but from the height of my very great age, from the height of thy papacy, I pray thee. Teach me, for I do not know. Lord they are thy little innocents. And I, Innocent, I do not know, I do not know.

THE THREE CHILDREN

THE THREE CHILDREN.

WE three, Nicholas who cannot speak, Alain and Denis, started along the roads to go to Jerusalem. We have been walking a long time. White voices called us in the night. They called all little children. They were like the voices of birds that have died in winter, and at first we saw many poor birds stretched on the frozen earth, many little birds with red throats. Then we saw the first flowers and the first leaves and we plaited crosses with them. We sang in the villages, as we were wont to do at New Year's. And all the children ran to us. And we went forward like a flock. Some men cursed us, not knowing the Lord. Some women held us back by our arms and questioned us, and covered our faces with kisses.

And besides, good souls brought us wooden bowls, warm milk, and fruits, and every one pitied us. For they do not know where we are going and they have not heard the voices. ¶ In this land there are thick forests and rivers and mountains and paths full of briars. And beyond the land is the sea we are going to cross so soon, and beyond the sea is Jerusalem. We have neither governors nor guides. But for us all roads are right. Though he cannot speak Nicholas walks like us, Alain and Denis, and all lands are like and alike dangerous for children. Everywhere there are thick forests and rivers and mountains and thorns. But everywhere the voices will be with us. There is a child here called Eustache who was born with his eyes sealed. He holds his arms stretched out and smiles.

We see no more than he. A little girl leads him and bears his cross. Her name is Allys. She never speaks and never cries; she keeps her eyes fixed on Eustache's feet so as to hold him up when he stumbles. We love them both. Eustache will not be able to see the holy lamps of the sepulchre. But Allys will take his hands and make him touch the flag-stones of the tomb. ¶ Oh, how beautiful are all earthly things! We do not remember anything because we have never learned anything. But we have seen old trees and red rocks. Sometimes we pass through long darkness. Sometimes we walk until evening in bright meadows. We have shouted Jesus's name into the ears of Nicholas and he knows it well. But he cannot say it. He rejoices with us at what we see. For he can

open his lips for joy, and he fondles our shoulders. And so they are not unhappy; for Allys watches over Eustache and we, Alain and Denis, watch over Nicholas. People told us that we should meet ogres and were-wolves in the woods. They were liars. No one has frightened us; no one has hurt us. The lonely and the sick come to look at us, and old women light lights for us in their cabins. The church bells are rung for us. The peasants look up from the furrows to watch us. The animals, too, look at us and do not run away. And since we have been walking the sun has become warmer, and we no longer pick the same flowers. But all stalks may be plaited in the same shapes, and our crosses are always fresh. Therefore we are of good hope, and soon we shall catch sight of

the blue sea, and beyond the blue sea is Jerusalem. And the Lord will let all of us little children come to his tomb, and the white voices will be joyful in the night.

FRANCOIS LONGUEJOUE, CLERK

FRANCOIS LONGUEJOUE, CLERK

This day, fifteenth of the month of September after Easter, in the year of our Lord twelve hundred and twelve, there came into the office of my master Hugues Ferré, many children who asked to cross the sea to go to the Holy Sepulchre. And since the said Ferré has not enough merchant vessels in the port of Marseilles, he commanded me to call on master Guillaume Porc to fill out the number. Masters Hugues Ferré and Guillaume Porc will conduct the ships to the Holy Land for love of our Lord Jesus Christ. More than seven thousand children, of whom none speak savage tongues, are now scattered outside the city of Marseilles. Accordingly the honorable sheriffs, fearing

famine, met together in the town house, where, after deliberation, they called for our said masters to exhort and entreat them to send forth the ships with much speed. The sea is now not very favorable because of the equinox, but we must consider that such a concourse might be dangerous to our good town, especially since these children are all famished by their long journey and know not what they do. I have had the mariners called to the wharf, and the ships equipped. At high tide they can be dragged into the water. The crowd of children is not in the city, rather they have overrun the beach, gathering shells for pilgrimage badges, and it is said that they marvel at the star-fish and imagine that they have fallen alive from the sky to show them the way of the Lord. And as to this strange happening this is what I have to say:

first, that it is to be wished that masters Hugues Ferré and Guillaume Porc promptly lead this foreign turbulence out of our city; secondly, that the winter has been very severe, wherefore the ground is poor this year, a thing well known to all our traders; thirdly that our Mother the Church has been in no way advised of the plan of this horde from the North, and that she will not meddle in the madness of a childish army (turba infantium). And we should praise Masters Hugues Ferré and Guillaume Porc as much for the love that they bear our good town, as for their obedience to our Lord in sending their ships and convoying them at this equinoctial season, and despite great danger of attack from the infidels

who scour our seas in their
felluccas from Algiers
and Bujeiah.

THE CALANDAR

THE CALANDAR

GLORY to God! Praised be the Prophet who has permitted me to be poor and to wander through the towns calling on the Lord. Thrice blessed be the holy companions of Mohammed who founded the divine order to which I belong! For I am like him when he was driven with stones from the infamous city which I will not name, and when he took refuge in a vineyard, where a Christian slave had pity on him and gave him grapes and was touched by the words of faith at the fall of day. ¶ God is great! I have passed through the towns of Mossoul, and Bagdad, and Bosrah, and I have known Sala-ed-Din (God rest his soul) and the Sultan his brother Seif-ed-Din, and I have beheld the Commander of the

Faithful. I live very well on a little rice that I beg and on the water that men pour into my calabash. I preserve the purity of my body. But the greatest purity inhabits the soul. ¶ It is written that, before his mission, the Prophet fell into a deep sleep upon the ground, and two white angels descended on the right and on the left of his body, and stood there. And the white angel on the left opened his chest with a golden knife, and drew out his heart whence he pressed the black blood. And the angel on the right opened his belly with a golden knife, and drew out his bowels which he purified, and they put back the entrails in their place, and from that day the Prophet was pure to announce the faith. That is a superhuman purity which pertains especially to angelic beings. Yet

children also are pure. Such was the purity which the prophetess longed to beget when she perceived the halo about the head of Mohammed's father and tried to join herself to him. But the father of the Prophet became one with his wife Aminah, and the halo vanished from his brow, and thus the prophetess knew that Aminah had conceived a pure being. Glory to God who purifies. Here, in the porch of this bazar, I can rest, and will greet the passers-by. Rich cloth and jewel merchants are squatting on the ground. There is a caftan that must be worth a thousand dinars. As for me I need no money and am as free as a dog. Glory be to God! ¶ Now that I am in the shade I remember the beginning of my discourse. First I spoke of God, than whom there is none other God, and of

our holy Prophet who revealed the faith, for that is the origin of all thoughts whether they come forth from the mouth or whether they be traced with a reed. In the second place I considered the purity which God has granted to saints and angels. In the third place, I meditated on the purity of children. Indeed I have just seen a great number of children who have been bought by the Commander of the Faithful. I saw them on the highway. They walked like a flock of sheep. It is said that they are from the land of Egypt and that Frankish vessels landed them there. Satan possessed them, and they tried to cross the sea to go to Jerusalem. Glory be to God! He has not suffered so great a cruelty to be accomplished. For these poor children would have died on the

way, having neither support nor provisions. They are altogether innocent. And at the sight of them I threw myself on the ground and I smote the ground with my forehead, praising the Lord with a loud voice. ¶ Now these children were ordered thus. They were clothed in white and they wore crosses sewed on their garments. They did not know where they were, and did not seem to be troubled. They keep their eyes steadily fixed on the distance. I noticed one of them that was blind and that a little girl held by the hand. Many have red hair and green eyes. They are Franks who belong to the Emperor of Rome. They falsely worship the prophet Jesus. The error of these Franks is manifest. First it is proved by books and miracles that there is no other word than the word of

Mohammed. Next, God day by day allows us to glorify him and to seek our bread, and he commands the faithful to protect our order. Finally, he refused light to these children who, tempted by Eblis left a distant land. And he did not manifest himself to warn them. And if happily they had not fallen into the hands of the Faithful they would have been seized by the fire-worshippers and chained in deep caverns, and those cursed ones would have offered them as a sacrifice to their devouring and detestable idol. Praised be our God who does all things well and who protects even those who do not confess him. God is great! I will go now into this goldsmith's shop and ask my share of rice, and proclaim my scorn for riches. If it please God all these children shall be saved by faith.

LITTLE ALLYS

LITTLE ALLYS

I CAN hardly walk now, because we are in a burning country where two wicked men of Marseilles brought us. At first we were tossed by the sea for a black day in the midst of the fires of heaven. But my little Eustache was not frightened, because he saw nothing and because I held both his hands. I am very fond of him and I came here for his sake. For I do not know where we are going. We have been gone so long. The others talked to us about the city of Jerusalem which is beyond the sea, and about our Lord who would be there to receive us. And Eustache knew our Lord Jesus well, but he did not know what is Jerusalem, or a city, or the sea. He fled to obey voices, and he heard

them every night. He heard them in the night because of its silence, for he cannot tell night from day. And he questioned me about these voices, but I could tell him nothing. I know nothing, and I am only troubled about Eustache. We walked near to Nicholas and Alain and Denis; but they embarked in another vessel, and all the vessels were no longer there when the sun came out again. Alas, what has become of them. We shall meet them again when we are near our Saviour. It is still very far. They talk of a great king who has sent for us and who holds the city of Jerusalem in his power. In this country everything is white, even their houses and their raiment are white, and the women's faces are covered with veils. Poor Eustache cannot see this whiteness, but I tell him of it

and he rejoices. For he says it is a sign of the end. The Lord Jesus is white in a white country. I am very tired, but I hold Eustache by the hand so that he shall not fall and I have not time to think of being tired. We will rest to-night, and as usual I will sleep by Eustache, and if the voices have not forsaken us I will try to hear them in the clear night. And I will hold Eustache by the hand until the white ending of our great journey, for I must show him the Lord. And surely

the Lord will have pity on
Eustache's patience,
and will grant
Eustache
sight.

GREGORY IX

GREGORY IX

BEHOLD the devouring sea, it seems innocent and blue. Its folds are soft and it is bordered with white, like a heavenly robe. It is a fluid sky, and its stars are alive. On this rocky throne whither I have let them bear me from my litter, I meditate concerning it. Truly it is in the midst of all the lands of Christendom. It receives the sacred waters in which the Precursor washed away sin. On its shores all the saints have bended their heads, and it has rocked their transparent reflections. Mysterious great anointed, lacking both ebb and flow, lulling azure set in the ring of the world like a liquid jewel, I question you with my eyes. O Mediterranean Sea, give back to me my children! Why have

you taken them from me? ¶ I never knew them. Their young breathing has never fondled my old age. They have not come and besought me with their tender lips half-opened. Alone, like little vagabonds, full of blind and furious faith, they rushed toward the promised land and were destroyed. From Germany and Flanders, and from France and Savoy and Lombardy they came toward your perfidious waves, holy sea, with vague, whispering words of adoration. They went even to the city of Marseilles; they went even to the city of Genoa. And you carried them in ships on your broad foam-crested back; and you turned and stretched your green arms toward some and kept them. And the rest you betrayed by leading them to the infidels; and now they pine in Eastern palaces, captives

of the worshippers of Mohammed. ¶ In former times a haughty king of Asia caused you to be beaten with rods and loaded with chains. O Mediterranean Sea! who shall pardon you? You are woefully guilty. It is you that I accuse, you only, sea, falsely limpid and clear, evil phantom of the sky; I call you to judgment before the throne of the Most High on whom depend all creatures. Consecrated sea, what have you done with our children. Lift up to him your cerulean face; stretch out to him your fingers shivering with bubbles; shake your unnumbered purple laughter, let your murmuring speak, and justify yourself to him. ¶ Dumb are your white mouths which die on the beach at my feet. In my palace at Rome there is an ancient, ungilded cell which age has made white as an alb. The

pontiff Innocent was wont to withdraw thither. It is said that he meditated there long on the children and their faith, and that he asked the Lord for a sign. Here, from the height of this rocky throne, in the free air, I declare that this pontiff, Innocent himself, had the faith of a mere child, and that he shook his weary locks in vain. I am much older than Innocent; I am the oldest of all the vicars whom the Lord has set here below, and I only begin to understand. God does not manifest himself. Did he aid his son in the Garden of Olives? Did he not forsake him in his greatest agony? Oh, what childish madness to call on him for help! All evil and all trial dwell only in us. He has perfect trust in the work moulded by his own hands. And you have betrayed his trust. Divine sea, be

not astonished at my words. All things are equal before the Lord. The superb reason of men is of no more worth, in the measure of the Infinite, than the little, rayed eye of one of your beasts. God grants the same care to a grain of sand as to the emperor. Gold ripens in the mine as perfectly as the monk reflects in his monastery. All parts of the world are as guilty one as another when they do not follow the course of mercy, for they proceed from him. In his eyes there are neither stones nor plants nor animals nor men, but creations. I see all those white heads that leap above your waves and melt in your waters; they spring up but a second in the light of the sun and they can be damned or chosen. Extreme old age governs pride and enlightens religion. I feel as much pity for this little

mother of pearl shell as for myself. That is why I accuse you, devouring sea, you who have swallowed up my little children. Remember the Asiatic king who punished you. But that king was not a century old. He had not undergone enough years. He could not understand the facts of the universe. I, then, will not punish you. For my accusation and your murmuring would come together to the feet of the Most High there to die as the seething of your drops dies at my feet. O Mediterranean Sea I pardon you and absolve you. I grant you most holy absolution. Go and sin no more. Like you I am guilty of sins I know not of. You continually confess yourself on the beach with your thousand moaning voices, and I confess myself to you, great sacred sea, through my

withered lips. We confess ourselves one to the other. Absolve me and I will absolve you. Let us return to ignorance and purity. So be it. What shall I do on earth? Let there be an atoning memorial, a memorial of the faith that does not know. Ages to come must see our devotion and must not despair. God led the little child crusaders to himself by the sea's blessed sin; innocents were massacred; the bodies of the innocents shall have a resting place. Seven ships went down at the Hermit's Rock; on that island I will build a church of the New Innocents and there I will found twelve prebends. And you will give me back my children's bodies, sacred and innocent sea; you will carry them to the beaches of the island, and the prebendaries shall place them in the church crypts;

and above them they shall light eternal lamps in which the holy oils shall burn, and they shall show pious travellers all those little white bones at rest in the darkness.

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